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## THE MEN WHO MADE ISRAEL<sup>1</sup>

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### INTRODUCTORY

1. "Israel" is the name given to a people that dwelt in the southern part of the highlands forming the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Few nations have been smaller in numbers or have occupied narrower territories, yet none has more deeply influenced the life of mankind. This influence has been due to the work of great men who in the crises of the national life appeared as leaders and teachers of their people. They pointed out the path for the people to tread, and led the way; as statesmen they gave the nation its laws and directed its policy; as teachers they held up lofty ideals of morals and religion, and warned against error and evil. All that was best in Israel's life is reflected in their words and deeds. Hence, as is true of no other ancient people, Israel's history is the history of its heroes. In studying their lives we study in the most vital way the history of Israel.

2. If Israel had run its course among the other nations of the ancient world and like them passed away, the lives of its heroes and their achievements would still make its history worthy of study. They did not, indeed, win fame as mighty conquerors whose victorious armies marched far and wide, changing the face of the oriental world. Their exploits were confined within the borders of their own nation, and their names were hardly known beyond its horizon. It was the spirit that fired them which gives them distinction—a spirit of devotion to the right, of loyalty to Jehovah, the righteous God, of zeal to make Jehovah's righteous will prevail in the nation. They were teachers and witnesses of a religious ideal which they sought

<sup>1</sup> The series of articles of which this is the first form the first part of a book on the heroes of Israel which the late Professor George S. Goodspeed left incomplete at the time of his death. The studies were prepared with a view to the needs of students in secondary schools and Sunday-school classes of similar grade. As being models of their kind, such of them as stood complete at the time of Professor Goodspeed's death, are now to be published.

to bring to bear on every side of Israel's life. Whether as lawgivers or warriors, kings or priests or prophets, they were inspired by a vision of God which both lifted them above the level of their time and nerved them to the task of bringing their countrymen up to the higher plane on which they stood. In doing this work they did more. They gave expression to ideas that have deeply moved the world ever since. They founded a religion which still is living and powerful. Their lives and teachings have been gathered up into a book of religion, the Old Testament. This religion has been taken up into Christianity, the world's great religion; this book united with the New Testament forms the Bible of Christianity. Surely, if the course of empire from Alexander to Caesar and Napoleon, world-conquerors, is worthy of study; if what scholars have discovered concerning the structure of the earth, or the constitution of man's body should be known by all educated persons—much more should we seek to know what men of old have done to make truth and right prevail on earth, what the great teachers have taught about the true grandeur of nations and the chief duty of man. This was the work of the heroes of Israel, and this makes the history of Israel of unceasing interest and value in our education.

3. Although Israel was a small state with petty interests, it formed part of a larger world of wide area and abounding life. This world of the Ancient East extended from the valleys of the great rivers Euphrates and Tigris to the valley of the Nile. The whole region was bound together in a physical unity. The Euphrates in its upper course connects the plain through which it flows with a series of fertile valleys and plateaus on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and this district in turn leads down to the valley of the Nile. Lofty mountain ranges on the east and north, the Mediterranean on the west, and the desert on the south and southwest, form its boundaries. The whole has the general character of a crescent. At its eastern point, at the mouth of the Euphrates and Tigris, lies Babylonia. The upper plain of these rivers is called Mesopotamia. The plateaus and valleys on the Mediterranean coast have the general name of Syria, the southern half of which is given the special name of Palestine. At the western extremity in the Nile valley lay Egypt. Through this crescent-shaped region from Babylonia to Egypt the

tides of human history flowed back and forth, and their course is recorded in the earliest chapter of the organized life of man upon the earth—the history of the ancient eastern world.

4. When that history began we shall probably never know; but by 5000 B. C., perhaps two thousand years before, men were already settled in Babylonia, living in cities with organized governments, well advanced in the arts of social life. By 4000 B. C. the same state of things may be observed in Egypt. At these dates peoples whose relationship is demonstrated by the language they spoke were at the head of affairs throughout the whole region. They are called Shemites or Semites, from the fact that Israel regarded them as all descended from one ancestor, Shem, the son of Noah. Their home was in the Arabian desert. From there in mighty waves of migration they rolled over the boundaries of the valleys east and west, and took possession of the fertile regions of this eastern world where they carried forward the primitive civilization and organization they found there to splendid achievement.

5. The fertile soil of Babylonia and Egypt, capable of producing abundant crops, gave their peoples an early start in the race for leadership. By 2500 B. C. all the Babylonian plain had been united under one king, ruling from the city of Babylon. His authority extended even to the Mediterranean Sea, where Babylonian traders had already brought the arts and civilization of their land. The Babylonian Empire extended from the Persian Gulf to the borders of Egypt. Meanwhile Egypt had not been idle and had been organized into one kingdom, with its capital first at Memphis, and later at Thebes. Under its rulers, called Pharaohs, a splendid civilization had been built up, which has its eternal monument in the pyramids, and reached its height about 2000 B. C. under the Pharaohs of the Twelfth Dynasty.

A few centuries after another wave of Semitic migration threw the whole eastern world into confusion (1700–1600 B. C.), out of which Egypt first emerged and became the leading power, its empire extending from the Nile to the upper Euphrates (1600–1300 B. C.). Its ascendancy was then broken, and after the passing of some centuries a new power, that of Assyria, on the upper Tigris, came forward and by the might of its armies conquered the entire eastern world and ruled it for three centuries (900–600 B. C.). Then it gave way to

Babylonia, which for a brief season enjoyed supremacy (600–538 B. C.), to be succeeded by a new and strange power, Persia, whose people, coming from the mountains beyond the eastern border of the Euphrates valley, conquered the Semitic nations and built up the greatest empire of the eastern world (538–325 B. C.). This empire in its turn was overcome by a people from the west, the Greeks, led by Alexander the Great, in whose mightier empire the world of the East and the world of the West were united in government and culture. Alexander's empire soon fell to pieces, but was followed by the gathering together of its parts into the solid structure of the Roman Empire, under the headship of the Italian city of Rome (about 200 B. C.), the victories of whose legions were utilized by the organizing genius of its statesmen to build a state which embraced the regions from the Euphrates to Britain, and endured for six hundred years (100 B. C.–500 A. D.). This sketch of the history of the ancient Eastern world illustrates the singular vicissitudes of its course and the series of forces which from century to century determined its progress. On this stage, and subject to these influences, Israel played its important, though minor, part, continuing from generation to generation through the whole drama to hold its unique place and develop the various phases of its marvelous life.

6. Israel was a branch of the same Semitic race which was the moving power in this long development of the Ancient East. But as an active force it did not appear till thousands of years of that history had elapsed. Its earliest recollections carried it back to the last centuries of that Babylonian Empire which laid its hand of organizing and civilizing power upon the lands of western Asia (about 2500 B. C.). Even then it remembered only forming a part of a large body of peoples that wandered through the plateaus of Palestine and gave rise to a brotherhood of nations under the leadership of heroes, of whom the foremost was Abraham, "the Father of the faithful." Not till a thousand years had passed and the Egyptian rule of this territory was over did it know itself as a nation brought into being by the creative genius of Moses, its lawgiver (about 1200 B. C.). Two centuries more followed, in which it brought its national life to completion by the setting-up of a kingdom (1000 B. C.), and became prominent among the states of the eastern Mediterranean coast under its kings, David

and Solomon. With varying fortunes, buffeted by the conflicting ambitions of the greater empires on the Nile, the Tigris, and the Euphrates, it endured a few centuries, until its kingdom was wiped out by Babylonia (586 B. C.) and its people exiled to Babylon. There their faith in Jehovah, revived by inspired teachers, held them together. With the victory of Persia a part of them were restored to their land (538 B. C.), rebuilt Jehovah's temple at Jerusalem and renewed the old life in the form of a religious community under Persian control, which held its own when the Persian yielded to the Greek and, after deeds of marvelous heroism in defense of its faith, even succeeded in wresting its independence from Greek rulers (143 B. C.). The new monarchy endured till Rome's all-embracing might swallowed it up (63 B. C.). Whereupon Israel's checkered and wonderful career loses its independent interest and is merged into the larger life of the Roman world.

As a framework for Israel's history, therefore, the following outline may be given.

1. Israel's Ancestry (to 1200 B. C.).
  2. The Beginning of the Nation (1200-1000 B. C.).
  3. The National Monarchy (1000-586 B. C.).
  4. The Exile (586-538 B. C.).
  5. The Religious Community (538-143 B. C.).
  6. The Religious Monarchy (143-63 B. C.).
7. For the knowledge of Israel's career the student is dependent on two chief sources:
- a) The historical documents of other nations with which Israel came into touch in the world of which it formed a part. The course of its life was intertwined with theirs, and their annals, therefore, interpret its own career. The great nations of Babylonia, Assyria, and Egypt have left abundant memorials, in the form of inscriptions of kings, accounts of military campaigns, lists of rulers, and the like. Even the remains of their architecture, painting, and sculpture, in temple, palace, and tomb, are instructive in throwing light upon the broad field in which Israel had its home, and in helping us to understand the conditions under which Israel lived.
  - b) But far more important than these is the record of its life which Israel itself has left. This record is not preserved in art. No splendid

buildings or statues remain to testify to its greatness. Israel accomplished nothing in these spheres. Its achievement was in the realm of religion. Its heroes were not artists or warriors, but men of God. Their memorials have been gathered up in the volume known to us as the Old Testament.

8. Two facts are of the first importance in the use of the Old Testament for the study of Israel's history.

a) The Old Testament is not a book but a collection of books. Israel was a literary people from its birth. Its first literature was songs, praising the deeds of its heroes, in lines which were handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. In the time of David and Solomon men began to collect these songs and write them down; they wrote also prose narratives of the events of the past. Soon after, the religious teachers put into writing the teachings they gave to the people, and the religious poets the psalms sung in the worship of Jehovah. From time to time collections were made of the ancient laws, and from the old narratives new books were compiled which gave a continuous history of the nation from the earliest times, to which additions were made bringing them up to date. The proverbs of the wise men were likewise gathered into collections. Scholars were constantly at work studying, revising, and republishing the old literature and contributing new works. When at last this process came to an end, the result appeared in the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. Almost every period of the nation's history is represented in this library, either by a book or by a poem or document which is contained in a book. Hence the historian of Israel is wonderfully aided by finding in the Old Testament material of the first importance for the study of each age. His chief difficulty arises in his task of disentangling from this library of the Old Testament just those documents which, imbedded in the various books, bear most directly on the period which he studies.

b) The purpose which inspired the writers of the Old Testament was a religious one. The teachers, students, and writers of every age collected, compiled, and wrote, in order to teach the people some vital truth about Jehovah, his character, his dealings with the nation, his will, and Israel's duty toward him. We find that there were three classes of such teachers in Israel. First came the prophets, who

emphasized the righteousness of Jehovah, his hatred of sin and love of goodness, and declared that his will was that Israel should do right or suffer punishment for wrong-doing. Second, the priests, who dwelt on the importance of proper worship of Jehovah, laid down rules for its conduct, and built up a vast structure of priestly law. Third, the sages, whose interest was in the wise conduct of daily life; who praised thrift, honesty, and self-control, and warned against excess; who philosophized on Jehovah's government of the world and man's duty to himself, his neighbor, and his God. It is doubtful if there is one of the books of the Old Testament which is not the work of one or the other of these three schools of teachers, and inspired by the corresponding religious idea. The memorials of the history of Israel are shaped by the same purpose. The prophet or the priest is interested in preserving the recollections of his national history, because he can illustrate by it the religious lesson which he wishes his people to learn. He does not care for art, or science, for the story of battles or the economic and social history, for the reigns of kings or the affairs of politics, except as they may serve this religious end. His first concern is not to write a history, but to make men better. In confining himself to this task, he omitted much that we should like to know; he found a poem, a legend, or a folk-tale as useful for his object as an actual historical fact, and sometimes saw the events and characters of the history solely in the light of his own religious attitude, passing by other details and other aspects which did not serve his purpose, and interpreting all in the light of his own ideals. On the other hand, his deep religious insight led him to look below the surface and point out the abiding truth of the historical scene beneath the mere details. Thus he made the history of Israel a permanent object-lesson for all time, and the Old Testament an unfailing source of instruction to mankind.